

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Update on Refocusing Secondary Education initiative (Work plan under separate cover)

History/Background:

In August 2004, the Kentucky Board of Education adopted a *Conceptual Framework for Refocusing Secondary Education* (Attachment A) to articulate the agenda for secondary reform in Kentucky. In June 2005, the department will update the Board on progress towards key components of the secondary agenda and seek board guidance on short- and long-term policy implications.

The Kentucky Department of Education introduced this Framework to identify the Why, What and How of securing better outcomes for all Kentucky students. The Framework functions as a reminder that all aspects of work impacting middle and high schools, as well as the alignment between high school and postsecondary experiences, should be focused on:

- Zero Dropouts - Supporting every student to persist to graduation with a plan for transitioning to the next level of learning;
- A Learning Guarantee - Ready every student to leave high school prepared to participate in the next level of learning without need for remediation; and,
- A Plan for Life - Providing every student with the opportunity to perform at high levels in a chosen field.

The scope of work addressed within the Framework embraces students from the middle grades through high school and on to postsecondary education or training. The Framework uses as organizers three elements or areas of focus, and identifies specific areas of work within each:

- Progression Based on Performance in a Rigorous Curriculum - Aligned Standards, Incentives and Expectations
- Personalized Services and Supports – Building Relationships that Create Success
- Expanded Learning Opportunity – Invoking Communities of Geography, Academics and Practice to Make Learning Relevant

The Second Phase of the Refocusing Secondary Initiative – Within Kentucky and Developments at the National Level

Since the Framework was adopted nine months ago, there has been extensive discussion about how to improve the middle and high school experience among students,

practitioners and stakeholders within Kentucky. The Commissioner's CEO Superintendents Network studied the issue of high schools during the last year. The department has established a network of middle and high schools, the Secondary Alliance, and has linked the Kentucky network to a national network for middle and high school reform. A report from the Prichard Committee was released on May 15th and a report from the Kentucky Business Forum is expected to be issued in late June. Two major initiatives have emerged at the national level in which Kentucky is engaged.

The Student Voice

Seniors from the North Oldham Campus, a combined middle and high school engaged as a Vanguard site in Refocusing Secondary, have led a series of student focus groups on the kinds of schools that students need. In Fall 2004, the students received professional training in facilitating focus groups and held a series of sessions around the state in January, February and March 2005. The students will present their findings to the Board in June. The student comments will focus on the importance of relationships, creating expectations and incentives for high achievement and the value of individualized learning plans.

Student focus groups were held in conjunction with the Pike County Public Schools, the Graves County Public Schools, the Warren County Public Schools, the Fort Thomas Public Schools and the Kenton County Public Schools. In the process of conducting the focus groups, the North Oldham students identified and recruited a new group of students from around the state who will take over the work of the student voice in the 2005-06 school year. The department also charged the North Oldham students with recommending a design for continuing and sustaining this work, which will be presented in June.

In November 2004, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) held the second National Summit on Improving America's High Schools. Each state was supported in sending teams to the three-day conference. Kentucky was the only state to have students attending as members of the state team. The USDOE has awarded Kentucky a \$15,000 grant to support a statewide student summit on improving the middle and high school experience. Preliminary plans are to hold the summit in September 2005.

The Kentucky Secondary Alliance

The formation of the Kentucky Secondary Alliance in April 2005 represents the next phase of the Refocusing Secondary Education initiative. The Alliance is the engine through which the department will lead change, support local implementation and engage the public in the vision for secondary education. As of this writing, the Kentucky Secondary Alliance is a partnership of fifty districts, one hundred and thirty schools and programs, and other education partners. The department has invited the education cooperatives to be partners in the Alliance and several are already taking a very active role. (A list of current Alliance members may be found in Attachment B.) The goal of the Kentucky Alliance is to mobilize the resources, knowledge, and capacities of the partners

to shape policy, practice, and public engagement so that *all* Kentucky students leave high school prepared and ready to pursue a next level of learning in college and the workforce.

To ensure that Kentucky's work is connected to and informed by promising developments and proven practices beyond its borders, the department has established a relationship between the Alliance and the National Successful Practices Network (SPN) of the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE). The National Successful Practices Network, in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and with assistance from foundations and national education organizations, is conducting an ongoing initiative to share information about schools that have been most successful in providing all students with a rigorous and relevant education. Through this national connection, Kentucky schools are being provided with instructional materials, curriculum resources, access to practitioners in national model schools and an ICLE liaison that can respond to needs for information and technical assistance. With the ICLE, the department and the Alliance schools will be studying nine characteristics shared by all of the thirty high achieving high schools:

- 1) Students and teachers are supported through small learning communities.
- 2) An unrelenting commitment to high expectations exists, with a focus on literacy and reading taught across the content areas.
- 3) The 9th grade year is highly individualized; these schools do not use remediation.
- 4) The 12th grade year is most rigorous.
- 5) Decisions are made based on data.
- 6) Curriculum is rigorous and highly relevant; this extends to assessments.
- 7) Relationships and reflective thought are highly valued.
- 8) A laser-like focus on professional development occurs.
- 9) Leadership is crucial; leadership is distributed and organized around students rather than content areas.

The department and the ICLE hosted orientation sessions for the new Alliance members in April:

- April 11-Buckhorn State Park, Perry County
- April 12-Marrriott Griffin Gate, Fayette County
- April 13-Kenlake State Park, Marshall County

Over 500 district and school leaders attended the sessions, along with educational cooperative staff, several Highly Skilled Educators, and postsecondary representatives. Participants in the one-day sessions began the process of identifying priorities, local challenges, needs for technical assistance and next steps.

Commissioner Wilhoit, who was not able to be physically present, delivered the opening message via video. Key points were:

- The Kentucky Alliance will be an action-oriented organization, whose members are committed to making substantive progress toward measurable goals.

- The Kentucky Department of Education is sponsoring this network as the means to provide top-down support for bottom-up reform all across our state.
- This will be a true partnership. We will engage the partners in doing work together that none of us can accomplish alone.
- We will collaborate on policy, share powerful strategies, engage our communities, and foster innovations.
- We will advance our work together so that our young people are prepared and ready to compete in the workforce of the 21st century.
- There are three fundamental principles guiding our work:
 - Every student must be engaged in a rigorous course of study that leads to college and workplace readiness upon graduation.
 - Every student's educational experience must be guided by an individualized plan for life-long learning and supported by relevant learning opportunities.
 - Every student must be engaged in ongoing, meaningful relationships with educators and other caring adults who place highest priority on helping that student reach his or her learning goals.
- We should bring middle and high schools together to align grades 6 through 10 as the time for students to master the core. We should engage postsecondary and the workforce in bringing the upper years of high school into much closer alignment with the two years beyond, differentiating curriculum and instruction to reflect the student's plan for transition.
- We have serious infrastructure needs in the areas of:
 - Teaching capacity, quality and compensation;
 - Professional development and resources for teachers so that they can provide powerful interventions in response to the individual needs of students;
 - Assessment redesign to address the dimensions of school accountability, student accountability, and school accountability for individual students;
 - Technology, so that no student's or teacher's learning opportunities are limited to place or time;
 - Alignment of policy, incentive programs and expectations between K12, postsecondary and the workforce;
 - Adequate funding and funding formulas that facilitate the educational goals we hold in common; and,
 - The department is taking steps to ensure the Alliance is adequately supported as it grows and becomes more active.

An Alliance Advisory Council will be formed during the month of May and should hold their first meeting in June. The role of the Council will be to provide: 1) the department and the ICLE with feedback about what districts and schools need to increase graduation rates and support every student to college and work readiness and 2) leadership within the state so that every middle and high school is actively engaged in this work. Over 400 Alliance members will attend the ICLE National Model Schools Conference in Nashville, June 26-29. On the last day of the conference, Commissioner Wilhoit and a KDE leadership team will meet in a closed three-hour session with Alliance members, Dr. Willard Daggett and his staff to set a course of work and related technical assistance for the upcoming school year.

The Commissioner will convene a meeting in late June or early July of the executive sponsors of the major initiatives impacting middle and high schools in Kentucky (i.e., GEAR UP, Kentucky Scholars, High Schools That Work, Local P16 Councils, KCTCS) to foster collaboration and continue to build consensus around a common agenda. Internal to KDE, the work of the Alliance will be closely coordinated with the Instructional Support Network, the CEO Superintendents Network and other leadership initiatives to ensure that a consistent and cohesive message is being delivered to districts.

Early feedback from the Alliance on priorities and need for resources affirms the input that the department has received from middle and high schools across the state. The major domains of work toward improving the middle and high school experience are identified as follows:

- Creating the public will for change – What is the purpose of high school in a 21st century economy? How can we build a sense of urgency for change among parents, educators and communities?
- Clarifying and raising expectations – What should the diploma credential? How should learning be credentialed? Where are the incentives for students?
- Individualizing learning – What options and services does every student need? What does performance-based teaching and learning look like? How do we close achievement gaps?
- Aligning policy - What policies must be revised and what new policies are needed?

Developments at the National Level

The **National Governor's Association** has undertaken a major initiative to improve high schools, called *Redesigning the American High School*. During the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools, the NGA released a five-point agenda:

- 1) Restore the value of the high school diploma
- 2) Redesign high schools
- 3) Give students the excellent teachers and principals they need
- 4) Set goals, measure progress and hold high schools and colleges accountable
- 5) Streamline and improve education governance

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) is offering a first phase of grants to states for high school redesign under the new NGA Center for Best Practices Honor States Grant Program. Kentucky has assembled a team to write a grant proposal, which will be submitted by Governor Fletcher on June 1, 2005. Representation on this team includes the Council on Postsecondary Education, Education Professional Standards Board, Kentucky Department of Education, and the Secretary of Education's office. Grants of up to \$1M for each of two years will be awarded to ten states in mid-summer and funds will be available in November 2005.

In conjunction with the NGA work at the national level, Kentucky has joined thirteen other states in the **American Diploma Project** Network. Extensive information about the Network may be found at www.achieve.org. Member states have committed to taking four actions:

- Aligning high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and work.
- Administering a college- and work-ready assessment, aligned to state standards, to high school students, so that students get clear and timely information and are able to address critical skill deficiencies while still in high school.
- Requiring all students to take a college- and work-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma.
- Holding high schools accountable for graduating students who are college-ready, and holding postsecondary institutions accountable for their success once enrolled.

The degree to and the manner in which each state will implement these goals will be consistent with the state's overall direction and strategic priorities. Achieve will assist the states through advocacy, support and collaboration. In Kentucky, one of the first tasks that Achieve will undertake is an examination of the reorganized core content and the Program of Studies to ascertain the degree to which they support college and work readiness upon graduation. When this work is done, it will be possible to:

- Promote the use of assessments based on these standards as indicators of readiness for placement in credit-bearing coursework in college and employment; and,
- Identify appropriate diagnostic and predictive assessments for use in the late middle and early high school years.

(A graphic depicting the major components of the American Diploma Project work in Kentucky is included as Attachment D.)

Kentucky's participation in both the National Governor's Association initiative and the American Diploma Project Network are consistent with Alliance priorities and will contribute to the state agenda for improving the middle and high school experience.

Priorities

The activities proposed below are not solutions in themselves. They have been identified as tools and resources that are needed to move the secondary agenda forward and are best provided from the state level. Implementing one in isolation of the broader context might have very little impact. End-of-course assessments, for instance, will be important tools for understanding student mastery of standards at points in time. Without, however, preparing teachers to use them strategically, providing students with options for learning the content, and creating incentives for all students to learn and be supported to learning at higher levels, end of course assessments could have very little impact on raising achievement and closing gaps.

Creating the public will for change

Among all the groups with whom discussions about the high school are ongoing, it is agreed that there is an urgent and serious need to create both internal and external pressure for change in the current system. The general public – including many educators - does not share the sense of urgency about the status of high schools, making it difficult for local leaders to raise expectations for all students and introduce more rigorous measures of accountability. Generally, schools encounter substantial pushback when they try to institute these changes.

The department is working with Governor Fletcher's office, the Prichard Committee, the Partnership for Kentucky Schools, and the Council on Postsecondary Education to design and secure funding for a public information campaign aimed at parents and students about the need to work hard and be successful in school. The campaign will attempt to forge the link in the public mind between education and economic well-being and quality of life. A limited amount of funding has been secured from the National Governor's Association to begin refining the message through a series of focus groups with adults this summer.

Clarifying and raising expectations – What should the diploma credential? And how?

The Kentucky Department of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education and workforce representatives are cooperating to close the expectations gap. The Board is familiar with the work that has taken place to reorganize the core content and to align standards in mathematics and language arts. The standards will be reviewed by Achieve for college and workplace readiness. Kentucky has developed Occupational Skills Standards and Assessments in 19 occupational areas. The standards are based on what employers indicate students should know and be able to do in applying for entry-level positions.

Many states are grappling today with **high school graduation requirements**, particularly in mathematics. Some states are adding a third credit for the first time. It is important to note the Kentucky is recognized by Achieve as being one of the first states to require three years of math and to specify at least two of those courses. Kentucky is also one of only thirteen states whose top tier diploma is considered close to reaching the level of college and workplace readiness.

As college and workplace readiness standards are more clearly articulated in the coming months, recommendations will be made to:

- Eliminate general track studies;
- Place all students in a curriculum that teaches and assesses the content in the Program of Studies; and,
- Change the high school graduation requirements so that the diploma credentials learning at a level sufficient to produce a college- and work-ready graduate.

As incentives to students, the department will make recommendations to:

- Work with the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority to revise the Kentucky Excellence in Education Scholarship (KEES) eligibility criteria to require participation in a college- and work-ready curriculum and to add value for performance, such as through end-of-course assessments (EOCAs), as feasible.
- Revise the Commonwealth Diploma to require at least one passing score on an Advanced Placement exam; and,
- Expand opportunities for all students to earn college credit while in high school.

There is substantial opportunity to use the data on the High School Feedback Report to illustrate the power of consequences to students, parents and educators. As the expectations of colleges and the workforce are clarified, and as more students understand the relevance of what they are expected to learn, the pushback on raising expectations should diminish.

End-of-course assessments are being designed for the purpose of improving student achievement by assessing individual student progress toward mastery of standards (Core Content for Assessment and Kentucky's Program of Studies). Districts need these assessments to make instruction more effective and to gauge the extent to which every student in every school has access to a rigorous curriculum that meets high performance standards.

The Secondary Learning Alliance for Mathematics Achievement (SLAMA) represents a learning community of five Kentucky school districts (Elizabethtown Independent, Jessamine County Schools, Oldham County Schools, Shelby County Schools, and Warren County Schools) and three universities (University of Louisville, University of Kentucky, and Western Kentucky University). With support from the Kentucky Department of Education in the fall of 2004, the five districts and the University of Louisville formed the learning community to: (1) create power standards based on the Kentucky Core Content in Mathematics and Achieve's American Diploma Project Mathematics Benchmarks for high school courses Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II and (2) to develop challenging end-of-course assessments based on these power standards.

Student performance data on the end-of-course assessments will be available for a variety of instructional and administrative purposes including:

- To increase the rigor and relevance of instruction and assessment (items are developed with a context)
- To identify gaps in learning and to diagnose needs for enrichment
- To identify students who are ready to accelerate
- To credential learning and verify credits in ways other than the Carnegie Unit, perhaps in combination with other assessments such as Advanced Placement exams, International Baccalaureate exams, Occupational Skill Standards tests, etc.)

- To assess readiness for the next level of learning
- To inform teacher professional growth plans
- To inform school and program improvement plans

End-of-course assessments (EOCAs) for Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry are being piloted in the authoring districts this spring. They will be transferred to the KDE this summer for further enhancement and to begin the review for technical soundness before they are released for more widespread pilots in Fall 2005. These first EOCAs should be in production in early 2006. Science and Language Arts will be developed beginning in the summer of 2005, following a similar model. KDE will establish a partnership of local districts and at least one postsecondary institution for each content area that will coordinate item development. The assessments developed during these projects will be piloted by the participating districts during the fall of 2005 and be available for release in mid-spring 2006 for use by districts statewide. Decisions will be made in the fall of 2005 regarding the development of end-of-course assessments for Social Studies. Professional development and technical assistance will support the roll out of EOCAs. KDE will work with the Council on Postsecondary Education and Achieve to analyze the potential use of EOCAs in the college placement process.

The rollout of end-of-course assessments will be supported by the availability of limited formative assessments in the same content areas, as those items are developed or identified by the EOCA authoring teams. The department's capacity to make formative assessments available and the capacity of teachers to use them effectively will increase over time. The University of Kentucky is the department's primary partner in the development of a statewide formative assessment system.

Because it is a declared priority, Alliance districts will be among the first to integrate end-of-course assessments into their instructional programs as a way to credential learning and award credits.

Individualizing learning – What kinds of options and services do students need?

The Kentucky Board of Education previously approved the department's proposal to provide a web-enabled **individual learning plan** with interfaces to the Go Higher website. The availability of the web-enabled plan will allow more districts to proceed with identified strategies for individualizing learning because it will be easier to understand the student as an individual, document progress, and collaborate around the learning needs of students across grades, programs and classrooms. Examples of particular challenges identified by districts and schools are:

- Districts are seeking ways to bridge the advising functions between middle and high schools and between high schools and postsecondary partners.
- Early diagnostics and powerful interventions are needed for students who are not reading on grade level or who do not have basic math skills before they leave the middle school. Diagnosis and intervention are improved through collaborative planning based on longitudinal assessment and disaggregation of data. Schools need

appropriate diagnostic tools, more varied instructional resources, and professional development for teachers.

- Schools need new models for scheduling and assigning teachers that are more flexible. To do this, schools need better ways to manage data and information about the unique interests and abilities of students so that they can project the need for resources and teaching capacity.
- Meeting the needs of students with exceptional needs, including those in special education, the gifted and talented, and those in alternative placements is especially challenging.

As of this writing, a Request for Proposals for the individual learning plan will be released on May 16, 2005, with a tentative award date of July 1, 2005. The learning plan will be associated with the student through a unique single student identifier (SSID). The SSID will be assigned electronically when the student is enrolled at each school and will follow the student throughout his/her educational career. This means that a student's plan can be generated when he/she reach a particular grade level or when the school system is entered at a higher-grade level. Because the SSID will be transferred from school to school and will be used even if the student leaves Kentucky's public system and returns, the relationship between the student and the individual learning plan can remain intact as well.

Co-incident with the rollout of the web-enabled plan, extensive professional development will need to be available on the use of the new tool itself. The larger challenge will be to provide the professional development and technical assistance that will ensure ubiquitous access to high-quality academic advising and that will help schools broker learning services with external providers. Teachers will need extensive professional development in supporting student-centered learning environments. The department will explore existing partnerships but consider new models as well, such as a program that would make Highly Skilled Counselors available in areas of greatest need.

Based on feedback from students, parents and schools, the department believes that a higher level of accountability should be introduced into the student planning process. In the upper years of high school especially, students should be assuming increasing levels of responsibility for designing and planning their learning and they should have a right to access the studies and experiences they need. For planning to be effective, students need a much broader range of options and more open and equitable access to dual credit, online learning, and internships or work placements that are directly connected to their plan for life after high school. Schools should bear more responsibility for, and be funded in ways that make it possible to, ensure that students have access to these kinds of opportunities regardless of where they live or their family income. On the other hand, students should be held accountable for engaging in the learning that they need to move toward a successful transition from high school.

To ensure that the needs of **students in alternative placements** are not overlooked within the Refocusing Secondary agenda, the department will initiate a task force to undertake a broad-based needs assessment of A5 and A6 programs in June. Research into

model programs and exemplars in other states will begin. In August 2005, the department will address the KBE on current tools for monitoring A5 and A6 programs and how they can be used in more effective ways. In Fall 2005, the task force will address the Board with findings and recommendations. In the meantime, KDE will work with alternative programs in Alliance districts to support the use of diagnostic, formative and summative assessments, online instructional resources and individual student plans.

Aligning policy with the secondary agenda

There are multiple barriers to connecting students with appropriate learning opportunities and services. Chief among those is the manner in which funding is related to seat time. At the same time that districts and schools are being challenged to move to systems where students progress based on performance, the districts are financially “penalized” for allowing a student to progress more quickly or for providing a student more time to gain competency in a particular area. Whether it is the term or the course of the time to graduation, the current funding model is at odds with the deliberate variability that schools need to meet the diverse needs of students.

The department will bring to the board recommendations on ways to change the manner in which schools are funded so that access to funds is separated from seat time. The recommendations will take into account the need to retain school and student accountability for attendance and participation.

In Summary

Based on the feedback received from students, educators, superintendents, the Alliance membership and others, the department is presenting priorities and proposed actions for the next phase of the Refocusing Secondary initiative. The priorities fall within the broad categories of: 1) creating the public will for change, 2) clarifying and raising expectations, 3) individualizing learning, and 4) aligning policy.

Policy Issues/Questions:

- Does the Kentucky Board of Education concur with the need for a public information campaign to change attitudes about the importance of high school education?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education have guidance for the department about the priorities or activities of the Kentucky Secondary Alliance?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education concur with the four goals of the American Diploma Project Network? Are they appropriate components of the Refocusing Secondary agenda?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree that the Program of Studies should be reviewed and updated to support the participation of every student in a college and work ready curriculum as a condition of graduation?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree that the criteria for KEES and the Commonwealth Diploma should be reviewed and revised to create incentives for students to perform at higher levels and in more rigorous courses of study?

- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree with the planned implementation of end-of-course assessments and related formative assessments?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree that a higher level of accountability should be introduced into the individual graduation planning process? Is the Board ready to consider changes in 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum requirements for high school graduation in August?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree with the proposal to address the needs of students in alternative placement?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree that the way secondary schools are funded needs to be reexamined? Is the Board ready to look at options in August?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education agree with the priorities that have been set forth?
- Does the Kentucky Board of Education have additional guidance for the department on how to move this work forward?
- What guidance does the Board have on how to approach the issue of teaching capacity and quality as part of the overall secondary agenda?

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

A large number of Kentucky students are not transitioning successfully from our high schools. Having failed to reach proficiency, they lack the knowledge and skills needed to engage in further learning, to be gainfully employed and be productive members of a society. Unless this situation improves dramatically, Kentucky faces increasingly complex economic and social challenges. Today's high schools are doing the job that they were designed to do. However, the product of that process is no longer sufficient to the needs of our society. The purpose of secondary education must be redefined in the public mind so that schools will be provided with the expectations, teaching capacity, resources and funding to support all students to proficiency and beyond.

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